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Soviet Intentions With Respect to Berlin

Submitted by the
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE
Concurred in by the
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD
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SECRET

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate:

The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Defense, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force.

Concurring:

Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State
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SOVIET INTENTIONS WITH RESPECT TO BERLIN

THE PROBLEM

To estimate probable Soviet intentions over the next few months with respect to Berlin, Germany, and certain related issues.

THE ESTIMATE

1. We recently estimated that it was unlikely that the Soviets were resolved to bring the Berlin issue to a head in some fixed period of time, and that they would probably continue their effort to obtain concessions through negotiations. We held it likely that the Soviets would not sign a separate peace treaty in the near future, but we did not exclude this possibility. At the same time, we stated that it was highly unlikely that the Soviets would come to regard Berlin as an issue to be settled by a genuine or lasting compromise; they would aim at eventual incorporation of the western sectors of the city into East Germany.¹

2. We believe that this estimate is still generally valid because we see no evidence that the Soviets feel able either to reduce their basic objectives or to abandon negotiations and seek these objectives by unilateral action. Soviet actions and statements in recent months seem to convey an indecisiveness about how to proceed further on the Berlin issue. The Soviet leaders apparently see the alternatives open to them as either unpromising or excessively dangerous. If the present diplomatic probe is continued, they probably believe, no results satisfactory in the light of their present

¹ NIE 11-9-62, "Trends in Soviet Foreign Policy," dated 2 May 1962, paragraphs 29-37.

SECRET

1

SECRET

demands are likely to be obtained. If harassments in the Berlin area are stepped up, these hold little promise of having a desirable effect on the negotiations unless they become so severe that, at the same time, the risks reach a level which the Soviets would regard as unacceptable. If the long-threatened separate treaty should be signed, it would either create a situation of very high risk or, if the threatened consequences for Western access did not ensue, constitute a manifest Soviet backdown. The longer the impasse has lasted, the more deeply it has engaged Soviet prestige, and Khrushchev's personal prestige as a Bloc leader as well; at the same time, the Soviets seem to have become more impressed with the dangers of any precipitate unilateral action.

3. The Soviet failure to opt decisively for a Berlin solution, either unilaterally or by a negotiated agreement, probably derives in part from the Soviet leaders' preoccupation with intra-Bloc relations and with internal problems. The intra-Bloc dispute, especially because of charges by the Chinese and some others of an insufficient militancy on the part of the Khrushchev leadership, may inhibit any move toward moderation on Berlin. The recent call for sacrifices by the populace, which the Soviets have justified by the need to maintain a strong military posture in the face of alleged US aggressiveness, militates against concessions and compromises abroad. While both these preoccupations presently tend to inhibit any significant moderation of the Soviet position, we doubt that they would be decisive in leading the Soviets to pursue a more aggressive course involving increased risks.

4. An important factor which we believe contributes to the USSR's hesitancy in pushing its Berlin objectives by precipitate action is that the Soviet leaders appear now to realize that the shift in the political-military relation of forces in the world has been less significant than they anticipated two or three years ago. In the military field in particular, the US acceleration of military programs beginning in 1961 has clearly impressed them as a manifestation of US determination, and has also forced them to con-

SECRET

front the economic implications of a new round of arms competition. At the same time, they have had to recognize that the West cannot be persuaded to accept their inflated strategic claims. Perhaps equally important, they have become aware that their real accomplishments in strategic weapons cannot be so readily translated into concessions by the West as they had earlier imagined.

5. The Soviets' public posture more recently has been marked once again by a more threatening tone and increasing emphasis on the extreme demand that the departure of Western troops must be a part of any settlement. This probably arises from their concern to dispel any notion that the USSR would accept a modus vivendi based on the status quo. Nevertheless the Soviets almost certainly do not expect the West to accept the maximum Soviet position as it currently stands, but apparently believe such a public stance is necessary to keep the West under pressure in negotiations. At the same time, they have probably been encouraged, by manifestations of Western disunity over the terms of a possible settlement, to hope that a serious rift in the Western front can still be opened up if the negotiations are continued. Most of all, perhaps, the Soviets wish to keep negotiations going for some time longer simply because it permits them to postpone a decision between harsher measures involving considerable risks and a compromise involving some degree of backdown.

6. While the Soviets are permitting negotiations to drag on, however, we think the chances are good that the Communists will launch a new round of Berlin harassments. We have no direct evidence to this effect, nor can we predict what tactics might be employed. But if we are correct in foreseeing a continuation of inconclusive activity on the diplomatic front, we believe that the Soviets will not wish to allow the entire Berlin situation to remain quiescent. New harassments would, as in the past, be intended primarily to keep pressure on West Berlin morale and on the Western negotiators, rather than to culminate in a unilateral resolution forced on the West under circumstances of high risk.

SECRET

3

SECRET

7. So long as negotiations are not broken off, the Soviets can at any time exercise the option of reducing their demands enough to get at least within talking range of the Western position. They might come to feel that if they were willing to concede a continued Western presence in Berlin they could gather in enough Western concessions—East Germans on the access routes, some degree of de facto recognition for East Germany—to permit them to construe the result as a real change in the situation, and even one which pointed to further and more fundamental changes later. To moderate their demands on the narrower Berlin issues of Western presence and access would also open up possible gains in broader questions relating to Germany—the NATO-Warsaw Pact nonaggression treaty, the agreement on nondiffusion of nuclear weapons, implicit acceptance of Germany's present frontiers, and the establishment of all-German commissions. The Soviets must realize that to move the negotiation to these issues, even if it did not result in agreements to their advantage, would offer fine opportunities for mischief-making with Western unity.

8. For the near future at least, we do not think that the Soviets are likely to moderate their demands in order to take the negotiations off dead center. However, we think they are more likely to do this than to resort to major unilateral action, such as a separate treaty. Most likely of all is a continuation for the present of the same rigidity in negotiations without at the same time any serious move to break them off. This is our best judgment derived from an interpretation of recent Soviet behavior, rather than from any significant body of intelligence data.

European Integration

9. The increasing concern which the Soviets have shown over the movement for Western European unity may be becoming a factor of greater importance in influencing their further course on the Berlin problem. They might calculate that, if they sharpened the crisis greatly and won concessions in this way, this would cause a serious disenchantment with its allies on the part of West Germany and so set back

SECRET

the whole process of integration. They might, on the other hand, calculate that to ease their policy greatly on the Berlin and German questions would deprive the Western unity movement of its urgency, and in particular revive hopes in West Germany that there was still a chance to talk to the Soviets about reunification if the European unity movement went no further. Finally, the Soviets might decide that, instead of a radical change of course in either of these directions, the best way to adversely affect Western unity would be to offer a compromise on Berlin which the US and Britain would be willing to entertain, but which gave serious offense to the Germans. We are uncertain which of these or other possible alternatives the Soviets might choose, but we do believe that concern over the development of unity in Western Europe may sooner or later become an important factor in precipitating some movement in their policy on Berlin.

10. One reason for the sharpened concern now being shown in Moscow over the Common Market is probably that the further steps being taken in the latter's development have coincided with a period of renewed economic strain in the Bloc. The Common Market presents not only a general political challenge but will also have an economic impact of some importance, since Soviet and more particularly Satellite trade will be adversely affected. The Soviets are, of course, aware that the issue of UK membership in the EEC is a crucial turning point. We expect therefore that they will seek means of complicating or delaying this development. To this end they will do what they can to aggravate any division within the EEC and between the EEC and the UK. One line of action could be new pressures and warnings to the UK's partners in the Free Trade Area, especially Austria and Finland.

11. While the Soviets have limited economic resources to disrupt the EEC, they may feel that they have some potential leverage in the case of West Germany. East Germany has already approached West Germany for long-term credits, and other proffers to West Germany of broader trade opportunities in the Bloc may be forthcoming. The Soviets

SECRET

5

SECRET

may feel that such an economic approach to West Germany would not be effective without political inducements in addition, and this may lead them to entertain a moderation of their policy on Berlin and Germany.

12. The most promising field of action for the Bloc, however, is in the underdeveloped areas, rather than in Europe itself. The Soviets are mounting an extensive campaign to represent the EEC as a new and more tightly coordinated form of colonialism, and they will exploit this theme in connection with their own offers of trade and aid to the newly independent states. The Soviets probably hope to mobilize the anxieties of Afro-Asian and Latin American states over the Common Market and to organize a countermovement, such as the recent proposals for a UN-sponsored world trading arrangement. We expect further initiatives along this line, in which they probably expect Yugoslavia to join. In general, the Soviets will do what they can to maximize the political costs of further progress in consolidating the European community.

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